

# Conserving Threatened and Endangered Species

*“The strength of each country’s conservation ethic is measured by the wisdom and effectiveness of its legislation in protecting biodiversity. Without dispute the most important conservation law in the history of the United States is the Endangered Species Act.”*

—E. O. Wilson,  
*The Future of Life*

A great many of the national parks were set aside for conservation because of their spectacular natural beauty. The National Park Service took them in as a whole, and now we are beginning to understand how the parts function and interact. Passed 30 years ago, the Endangered Species Act contributes to park preservation goals by helping to ensure that the biotic parts of these ecosystems are not lost. The job begins with knowing what is in the parks and regularly assessing how the populations of federally listed species are faring. That information is compiled in the NPS Endangered Species Act database, which is now on a website available to NPS staff. With this information, we can determine which species are recovering and focus our efforts on those that continue to decline or restore those that have been lost from the parks. A growing number of species are being restored successfully, and a few of their stories follow in this chapter. For the future we will continue to increase our knowledge of these rare populations of plants and animals and take action when needed to secure their persistence in the national parks.



Formerly widespread on the island of Hawaii, Mauna Loa silversword, a federally listed endangered plant species, declined primarily as a result of disturbance by feral pigs, goats, and mouflon sheep. Hawaii Volcanoes National Park has been fenced to keep out these nonnative species and as of November 2003 had planted 6,800 seedlings over three years, with 83% survival. The core of the restored plants are within two 30-acre (12-ha) exclosures, which provide additional protection from feral animals.